

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

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S E C R E T MADRID 6077

EXDIS

USNMR SHAPE AND USCINCEUR EXCLUSIVE FOR GENERALS GOODPASTER AND EADE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR MARR SP

SUBJ: SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING: REQUEST FOR
REMOVAL OF U.S. TANKERS FROM TORREJON AIR BASE

REF: (A) MADRID 6076 (B) MADRID 6005

1. FOREIGN MINISTER STATED HE WISHED TO MAKE AGENDA ITEM OF AIR MINISTER'S REQUEST (REF B), WHICH HE ENDORSED AND MADE OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT REQUEST, TO TRANSFER US TANKER WING AWAY FROM TORREJON AIR BASE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE IF SERIOUS RISKS TO INTERESTS OF BOTH U.S. AND SPAIN ARE TO BE AVOIDED.

2. WHILE AGREEING OF COURSE TO CONVEY THE GOS REQUEST TO MY GOVERNMENT, I COMMENTED, SUBJECT TO CONFIRMATION FROM USG, THAT THIS REQUEST WOULD SEEM TO BE MORE PROPERLY ONE OF MATTERS FROM NEGOTIATIONS FOR NEW BASES AGREEMENT.

3. LOPEZ-RODO THOUGHT IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY DANGEROUS TO DELAY TRANSFER OF TANKERS FOR TWO YEARS. CALLING ATTENTION TO PHRASE IN 16TH AIR FORCE COMMANDER'S LETTER (REF B), "ACCIDENTS CAN AND DO HAPPEND", LOPEZ-RODO SAID QUESTION OF ACCIDENTS NOT HYPOTHETICAL, FOR SPAIN HAD WITNESSED NUMBER OF ACCIDENTS INVOLVING U.S. AIRCRAFT, EVEN DISREGARDING CRASH
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INVOLVING LOSS OF BOMBS AT PALOMAROS. LIMITING HIMSELF TO U.S. AIRCRAFT ACCIDENTS OF PAST 18 MONTHS, FOREIGN MINISTER CITED 4 INCIDENTS INVOLVING CRASHES OF 5 F-4'S SINCE MARCH 1972 AND AUGUST 28 CRASH OF C-141 NEAR HUEVA IN GUADALAJARA

PROVINCE. HE OBSERVED THAT ONE OF THESE ACCIDENTS ALMOST CAUSED CIVILIAN INJURIES AND ANOTHER HAD SPARKED ADVERSE PRESS CAMPAIGN IN LOGRONO AND ZARAGOZA AREAS. HE CONCLUDED THAT, IF SO MANY ACCIDENTS CAN OCCUR IN YEAR AND HALF, SPAIN CANNOT RISK WAITING FOR TWO YEARS FOR REMOVAL OF HAZARD TANKERS REPRESENT FOR MADRID AREA. HE AGAIN VOICED CONCERN THAT TANKER ACCIDENT COULD PRODUCE SERIOUS FIRE AND HEAVY LOSS OF LIFE (A "CATASTROPHE") LEADING TO PUBLIC CLAMOR THAT WOULD TURN PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST BASES AGREEMENT.

3. AT MY REQUEST, GENERAL EADE, ALTHOUGH ACKNOWLEDGING THAT AIRCRAFT ACCIDENTS OF COURSE DO OCCUR JUST AS DO ACCIDENTS OF SHIPS, TRAINS AND BICYCLES, EMPHASIZED EXCELLENT 15-YEAR SAFETY RECORD OF KC-135. HE DISCUSSED ADDED SAFETY STEPS USAF HAS TAKEN SINCE AIR MINISTER'S REQUEST, SUCH AS REDUCTION OF TANKER TAKEOFF WEIGHT AND DIVERSION OF DEPARTURE ROUTES AWAY FROM BUILT-UP AREAS. GENERAL EADE NOTED THAT STATISTICS SHOW KC-135 ACCIDENTS LESS PROBABLE THAN FOR OTHER MILITARY AIRCRAFT, THE FACT THAT IN 15 YEARS OF OPERATION THE KC-135 HAS NOT HAD A SINGLE TAKEOFF ACCIDENT AND THAT, IN ANY EVENT, POTENTIAL FOR CATASTROPHIC DAMAGE IN CASE OF ACCIDENT NOT NECESSARILY GREATER THAN FOR OTHER TYPES OF MILITARY AIRCRAFT.

4. LOPEZ-RODO WAS GRATEFUL FOR ADDITIONAL USAF SAFETY STEPS, BUT AGAIN STRESSED THAT NO ONE CAN ASSURE THAT THERE WILL BE NO ACCIDENTS. HE SAW PRESENCE OF TANKERS AT TORREJON AS "PLAYING WITH FIRE" AND URGED THAT "AS SOON AS POSSIBLE" THEY BE REMOVED TO ZARAGOZA OR MORON WHERE CHANCES MEASURABLY GREATER THAT ANY ACCIDENT WOULD OCCUR IN UNPOPULATED AREA. I POINTED OUT THAT PROBABILITY OF TANKER AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT EVEN LESS THAN THAT OF USAF AND SPANISH F-4'S FLYING FROM THE SAME BASE.

5. GENERAL DIEZ-ALEGRIA SAID THAT, IN ADDITION TO GOS CONCERN FOR SAFETY, REMOVAL OF TANKERS DESIRABLE ALSO TO EASE GROWING PROBLEM OF INTERFERENCE WITH CIVILIAN AIR
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TRAFFIC AT BARAJAS. HE RECALLED THAT IN NOVEMBER 1971, U.S. HAD REQUESTED SPANISH AUTHORITY TO STATION TANKERS AT ZARAGOZA IN EMERGENCY, CONCLUDING THAT SINCE U.S. ENVISAGED IT THEN, IT SEEMS FEASIBLE TO DO IT NOW. TAKING NOTE OF GENERAL EADE'S EXPLANATION THAT TANKER TAKEOFFS ARE CAREFULLY SCHEDULED TO AVOID CONFLICTS WITH CIVILIAN TRAFFIC AND THAT BARAJAS CONTROLLERS GIVE PRIORITY TO CIVILIAN CARRIERS, DIEZ-ALEGRIA THOUGHT IT WOULD BE MORE ADVANTAGEOUS TO USAF TO BASE TANKERS AT ZARAGOZA WHERE AIRCRAFT COULD OPERATE WITH GREATER MOBILITY AND WITHOUT REQUIREMENT TO YIELD TO CIVILIAN TRAFFIC. LOPEZ-RODO SECONDED THIS, ASSERTING IT WAS IN USAF INTEREST TO MOVE TO ZARAGOZA. WHILE AGREEING THAT MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT

BE VALID LONG-RANGE CONSIDERATION, I NOTED IT WOULD NOT
NECESSARILY SATISFY SPANISH NEED FOR A SHORT-RANGE SOLUTION.

6. FOREIGN MINISTER CLOSED MEETING BY AGAIN APPEALING
FOR EARLY REMOVAL OF TANKERS FROM TORREJON.
RIVERO

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